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To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 12/14/01 12:32pm
Subject: A humorous look at the world ahead.

I'm sending you this e-mail from 2021--40 years after IBM released its first personal computer--in a last attempt to prevent the mistakes in computer development that put civilization in jeopardy...
Not everything is awful. Some things are just, well, weird.

For instance, Apple Computer continues to do well, but not for its stockholders. The company gained tax-exempt status as a religion in 2015. Authorities were convinced the designation was appropriate after many users took to flagellating themselves in public when Steve Jobs failed to make any significant new-product announcements at Macworld in Boston. Apple evangelists have become common in shopping malls and airports. The cult tends to attract very nice people, and they've managed to integrate into society quite well. The rest of us simply avoid talking about technology around them lest we get flooded with irate e-mail.

Bill Gates has been barricaded for the last two years in a vast subterranean bunker, along with a core group of true believers from the old Microsoft Corp.

Gates and his minions literally went underground in 2019 after the Supreme Court ruled against the company for the 1,249th time in the antitrust case that began in 1997.

Authorities gave up trying to extract them after concluding that cracking open the bunker might hurt the people inside, who technically weren't criminals because they'd never actually been charged.

Various philanthropic groups tried to "deprogram" followers of the man who once headed Microsoft and entice them out of the bunker. But the would-be rescuers were usually met with derisive laughter. The Microserfs said they'd only emerge from their shelter if the humanitarians correctly answered three riddles.

One group, having craftily recruited a team of Linux programmers, was able to pass the test. But those inside insisted that the Linux folks must have cheated and thereafter refused to respond to any more entreaties from the outside.

The only reason we know they're still alive down there is the frequent issuing of news releases, such as the one yesterday declaring that Microsoft takes security very seriously. In recent weeks, the releases have sometimes taken on a more plaintive tone, offering bug fixes for

Windows Uber Grande users in exchange for a case of Malomars.

But the problem relating to the licensing system Microsoft established remains. Some years ago, the company stopped selling software outright and instead set up a subscription-based system. Users paid a fee, just like the cable bill and got to use a Microsoft operating system or Microsoft software, like the Office suite.

As a result, when Microsoft decided to issue an upgrade, we all upgraded pretty much simultaneously because the company eventually would cut off access to the older software. It wasn't too long before everybody, everywhere, was running exactly the same thing.

This had some great advantages. Computers got a lot simpler and more reliable because they didn't have to be quite as flexible. Things such as technical support and interoperability issues largely disappeared. All our appliances pretty much run on a stripped-down version of the Microsoft operating system, everything from the microwave oven to the thermostat.

The problem is, because everything runs the same operating system--even my electric shaver--once somebody discovers a security flaw, it can bring down our computers. All the computers. All over the world.

In some places, the power is on for only a couple of hours a day now. It's not safe to drive because the traffic lights can't be trusted. Torch-bearing mobs occasionally break into the homes of known technologists and . . . well, let's just say we're starting to run low on people who can fix things.

We're on the brink of disaster, akin to the great corn blight of 2012. Then, all commercially planted corn had been made genetically identical, which produced spectacular yields. But when a new disease infected a crop in a small field in Iowa, it ripped through all the corn around the world because none of the plants had any resistance to the blight. God, what I wouldn't give to taste Frosted Flakes again.

This story can be found at:
<http://www.dickypimpkins.com/article.php?sid=34>

Thanks for your time,

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